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SAFETY AND PROTECTION FOR COMBAT SPORTSPEOPLE

The NSW Government has acted to regulate dodgy practice and increase safety standards within the growing combat sports sector in NSW.

Sport and Recreation Minister Kevin Greene said new legislation was introduced into State Parliament today following exhaustive and extensive industry consultation.

The new laws finally allow women to participate competitively in a number of combat sports for the first time in NSW, bringing the State into line with the rest of the country.

“The Rees Government is protecting the growing number of athletes involved in combat sports from being exploited by dodgy promoters or injured in unsafe environments,” Mr Greene said.

“We’re replacing the Boxing Authority with the Combat Sports Authority and giving them stronger powers to deal with offences in areas like weigh-ins, medical examinations and contest permits and locations.

“It is clear for some dodgy promoters that it’s more profitable to stage big, unlawful events that draw in considerable revenue and cop a fine that doesn’t come close to hurting profit.

“That’s why we’re significantly increasing penalties, disqualifications, demerits, fines and suspensions to slash the economic benefit these promoters gain from unlawful events.

“For example, fines for promoting a contest without a permit have increased to **\$55,000** from **\$2,000**, and offenders could now face the further threat of 12 months in prison.”

Mr Greene said the new Combat Sports Act now covers a wider range of sports like Muay Thai, free-fighting, mixed martial arts and cage events.

“We’re targeting no-holds-barred events like ‘King of the Cage’, ‘Mixed Martial Arts’, ‘Tough-man’ promotions and other full contact sports presently outside the regulation of recognised associations,” he said.

“We are also working to stop people acting outside the law and avoiding regulations by conveniently renaming certain forms of kickboxing.

“Contestants, participants and promoters will also now be placed on a permanent register to bring them under the control and regulation of the Authority,” he said.

Mr Greene said a key part of the new laws enables women to participate competitively in combat sports in NSW.

“Women have been prohibited from taking part in competitive boxing matches in NSW since 1986,” he said.

“While this may have been in line with prevailing community standards at the time, it is clear there has been a significant shift in community attitudes.

“Sections of the community will always be opposed to women participating in combat sports and I accept that may never change.

“But these days, most people believe women should have the right to make their own judgements on this issue if they choose to do so.

“The safety of all participants in combat sports is paramount and the particular issues raised with the participation of women in these sports is recognised.

“That’s why the Combat Sports Authority will draft regulations specifically to address the protection of female combat sports participants,” he said.

Johanna Vescio, Senior Lecturer of Human Movement and Sport Management at the University of Technology Sydney, welcomed the Rees Government's initiative permitting the participation of NSW women in combat sports.

“Women have a right to access the same range of sport choices as men and I believe we should support girls who wish to take up boxing in a safe environment,” she said.

“It is particularly relevant in a time in which we need to address an environment that is not conducive to physical activity. Boxing provides another choice to be physically active, and it may not only contribute to a healthy lifestyle but to women and girls empowerment.”

Sydney University Boxing Club President Patrick Cunningham congratulated the Rees Government for giving women the chance to compete in their own State in competition boxing.

“We see this initiative as one long sought by the women members of not just our club, but many community clubs throughout the State,” Mr Cunningham said.

“Previously, as women’s boxing was not sanctioned here there was no NSW women’s title and no competitors representing their state in the National competition. Allowing them to compete and win in their own State will now allow them to be selected to represent Australia in national and international competition,” he said.